POETRY.

I am the reality of things that seem;
The great transmuter, melting loss to gain,
Languor to love, and fining joy from pain,
I am the waking, who am called the dream;
I am the sun, all light reflects my gleam;
I am the altar-fire within the fane,
I am the force of the refreshing rain;
I am the sea to which flows every stream.
I am the utmost height there is to climb;
I am the truth, mirrored in fancy's glass,
I am stability, all else will pass;
I am eternity, encircling time;
Kill me, none may; conquer me, nothing can—
I am God's soul, fused in the soul of man.

The New-York Tribune.

SUNDAY, JULY 7, 1907.

American readers are not perhaps generally aware of the fact that there has recently been a lively debate in England over certain new editions of Ruskin's works. For some time past a definitive edition of his complete works has been passing through the press, an edition practically invalidating the early editions of some of the great writer's most important productions. Ruskin was never a man unwilling to learn or to admit that he had made mistakes. He rewrote some of his books, and in some cases greatly augmented them. In the authorized edition, now going forward, we have his text as he wished it to go finally before the world. But certain early editions, having gone out of copyright, have lately been reproduced, and loud has been the outcry. There have been striking articles and letters on the subject in the London "Saturday Review," and these have just been put into a pamphlet by Mr. George Allen, Ruskin's publisher. It is called "Copyright and Copywrong: The Authentic and the Unauthentic Ruskin." Of course, the publishers of the old editions bring forward divers plausible arguments, but it certainly seems a hardship that the fame of an author who has overhauled and radically changed his book should suffer from the continued circulation of an edition which he had repudiated as out of harmony with his mature thought.

The fourth volume of Taine's correspondence, which completes the collection, has just been published in Paris. It brings the record down from 1876 to 1892. One of the letters written to his daughter contains an apt suggestion for present-day readers. He says:

As you speak about what you have been reading, I beg André not to recite to you Verlaine's poetry, and I beg you not to read the lyric poems of Elizabeth Browning. All that and Rossetti and Swinburne in England, and the Goncourts, Daudet, Bourget, and the other "decadents" in France are decidedly unwholesome. The reading of all those works has the effect on the mind of hashish or morphia.

Of course the narrow-minded gentry who are always so solicitous lest the world should be deprived of its right to all the unwholesome stuff in literature and art, could not but denounce this passage as bourgeois, philistine, provincial, and so on. We can hear these wiseacres protesting that while Taine was no doubt privileged to regulate his daughter's reading, it was preposterous of him to speak in that general way about the "decadents." Right-minded readers, however, will perceive the soundness of the brilliant Frenchman's opinion. He was no shallow pedant, but a man of letters of singular catholicity, and the remarks we have just quoted, written toward the close of a long life, out of a vast experience, are not to be lightly dismissed. After all, the mature judgment of a genius like Taine ought to have some standing, even at a time when "appreciation" of Mr. G. B. Shaw is supposed to confer a brevet of intellectual authority upon the person who achieves that virtue. But the ostentatiously "liberal" type, so common in our day, is wedded to his idols with a vengeance, and he has no ear for the voice of experience. Try to show him that there are things in art and letters which the world might well allow to die, and he springs to their defence in a kind of hysteria.

The recrudescence in this country of the flabbily vicious school of criticism is a little puzzling. It flourished for a time, but soon died a natural death, having proved unprofitable to its members and a dreadful bore to everybody else. Its recent revival can only be explained on the hypothesis that a new crop of sophomores has found its way into print. A "movement" may have long since been played out, but to the youthful mind just discovering it it is the biggest thing in the universe. Hence the shrill proclamations that assail us in honor of the various decadent individuals or groups developed in Europe. There is something touching about these ebullitions, but there is also something funny about them. They are pathetic because unhealthiness is always unfortunate, and they are funny because the zeal of our proud decadents is so incongruous and so disproportionate to the existing situation. They do not know that the world has moved. They do not realize that the causes they so strenuously advocate are old stories which have been tested, and fixed in the perspective of things. Art, they maintain, will cease to exist if their little tin gods are not immediately enthroned, and they foresee a bankrupt literature, a barren stage, if their sickly authors and dramatists are rejected. Meanwhile the mills of the true gods go on grinding without any perceptible dislocation of their machinery.

FRENCH SOCIETY.

Memories of It Before and After the Revolution.

MEMOIRS OF THE COMTESSE DE BOIGNE. 1781-1814. Edited from the Original MS. By M. Charles Nicoullaud. With portrait. 8vo, pp xxxvii, 458. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Some account of these memoirs was given in The Tribune by our Paris correspondent when they were published in France last March. It was shown then that they amply deserved to be translated, and we are glad that an English version has been produced with so little delay. The Comtesse de Boigne had a long and extremely diversified career. Born in 1781, and dying in 1866, her life embraced a period so full of momentous changes that her memoirs make almost as romantic reading as you will find in a novel. M. Charles Nicoullaud, who has had the privilege of preparing them for the press, presents her in his introductory essay as a woman of character as well as of charm. She liked to welcome brilliant minds to the salon which she maintained for many years, and her editor is doubtless justified in assuming from the distinction of her circle that she was herself possessed of some intellectual qualities. A certain mental vigor is obvious merely upon the surface of her narrative, and by the time the reader has followed all her adventures he is not unlikely to feel that he has been in the company of a notable personality. Yet, on reflection, he must feel also that the Comtesse de Boigne's importance for us is chiefly that of a woman who, having lived through many years of historical significance, has much to tell us about what she saw and heard. Though she was closely enough implicated in more than one passage of the drama she describes, her notes are essentially those of an onlooker.

ADELE D'OSMOND, COMTESSE DE BOIGNE.
(From the miniature by Isabey.)

Thrown by birth among the courtiers of Louis XVI, she and her family escaped the more tragic phases of the downfall of the old regime. Though the early marriage which she made was not a happy one, it at least made her future secure in a worldly sense, and she seems to have passed comfortably enough through all the political storms of her time, enjoying good society and storing up interesting impressions. What she cannot describe to the reader on her own authority she describes on that of eyewitnesses, her parents or her friends. Thus, while she was but a child at the time of the Revolution, she is able to give a trustworthy and extraordinarily vivid picture of that curious world which it turned upside down. Her earlier chapters are full of valuable data relating to the royalist tradition as it persisted in spite of the rising tide of liberalism.

Her father, though a soldier with little of the courtier in his make-up, was prevailed upon by the Comtesse d'Osmond to establish himself at Versailles. Social conditions there in the late eighteenth century make no new story, yet every book concerning them that appears must deepen the reader's astonishment. It is hard, with the scale and grandeur of the famous palace in mind, to get used to the conception of court life within its walls which history nevertheless forces upon us. When the royal family and some thirty guests assembled for a supper party in the King's private apartments they supped in quarters so circumscribed that the billiard table had to be covered with planks to form a sideboard. Invitations to these suppers were issued to ladies in advance, but, as the Comtesse observes, "the fate of the gentlemen was less agreeable." It is not surprising that the soldierly d'Osmond shrank from the procedure imposed upon all those of his sex who craved the honor of sitting at meat with Louis XVI. In the evening they attended the performance in the small palace theatre and there their fate as to supper was settled as follows:

Courtiers who wished to be invited took their seats there; during the performance the King, who was alone in his box, surveyed these seats through a large pair of opera-glasses, and could be seen writing a certain number of names in pencil. The occupants of these seats (and to take a seat was known as *se presenter pour les cabinets*) then waited in an ante-room to the *cabinets*.

Shortly afterward an usher, candlestick in hand, and holding the slip of paper written by the King, half opened the door and pronounced a name, the fortunate man then bowed to the remainder, and entered the holy of holies. The door reopened, another name was called, and so on until the list was finished. At the last name the usher closed the door with a customary bang.

This sound informed the remainder that their hopes were vain, and they went off somewhat downcast, though they had been well aware that there were more candidates than invitations.

An etiquette of Spanish rigidity governed the court. Rank and wealth, the Comtesse notes, were hand in glove in Parisian society, but notwithstanding the seeming flexibility the man who could not produce proofs of nobility was sure, sooner or later, to meet discomfiture if he carried his social aspirations too far. We are told of one rich young officer who thought that because he frequented the best society he could go to one of the Queen's balls at Versailles. "He was turned out with such harshness that he committed suicide on arriving in Paris, in despair at the ridicule to which he was exposed in an age when ridicule was the worst of calamities." It is recorded of the Duc de Coigny that on the day when his daughters were to be presented at court he said to them, "Remember that in this country vice is immaterial, but ridicule is fatal." At the same time that the court pedantically laid down the law, it was characterized by the queerest defects of what may be called social administration. The royal hospitality was full of fantastic contrasts. It might raise a man to the pinnacle of mundane satisfaction, but, incidentally, it subjected him to the crudest hardships. "At Fontainebleau the guests were given nothing more than a bare *appartement*. They were obliged to find their own furniture, linen, etc., and to provide their own food."

The Comtesse has some sharp observations on the amusements of the courtiers, and especially the gambling that went on among them. It is to this vice that she attributes much of the unhappiness of the Queen, asking, "Who would have dared to accuse the Queen of France of selling herself for a necklace, if she had not been seen before a table piled with money, attempting to win it from her subjects?" She dismisses with scorn the base calumnies fabricated out of whole cloth by the Queen's foes, but she is plainspoken about Marie Antoinette's indiscretion, and especially animadverts upon her passion for fashion. "She dressed to be fashionable, ran into debt to be fashionable, gambled to be fashionable, was a free thinker to be fashionable, and was a flirt for the same reason." In regard to the King she has several amusing things to say. Perhaps her most picturesque reference to the subject occurs in her account of the manner in which Louis went to bed:

The King came in from an inner room, followed by his attendants. His hair was tied up and he had taken off his orders. Without paying attention to anybody, he walked inside the balustrade of the bed, and the almoner for the day took from the hand of the *valet de chambre* a prayer-book and a large candlestick with two lights. He followed the King within the balustrade, gave him the book, and held the candle during the prayer, which was a short one. The King then came back into that part of the room where the courtiers were standing. The almoner handed the candlestick to the first valet, and he to a person indicated by the King, who continued to hold it while the King was undressing. This was a much envied mark of distinction, and at every reception in the court all those who were coming down from the *coucher* were asked, "Who held the candlestick?" and the choice, as happens everywhere and at all times, was but seldom approved.

The King's coat, waistcoat and shirt were taken off, he stood there naked to his waist, scratching and rubbing himself as if he had been alone, in the presence of the whole court and often of many strangers of distinction.

The first valet handed the night-shirt to the most highly qualified person, to one of the princes of the blood if any were present; this was a right and not a favor. When the person was one with whom he was on familiar terms, the King would often play tricks while putting it on, stepping on one side to make the holder run after him, accompanying these charming jokes with loud guffaws, which greatly vexed those who were sincerely attached to him. When his shirt was on he put on his dressing-gown, while three valets unfastened his waist-belt and knee-breeches, which fell down to his ankles, and in that garb, scarcely able to walk with these ridiculous fetters, he would shuffle round the circle of those in waiting.

. . . . . .

When the King had had enough of it he shuffled backward to an arm-chair which was pushed into the middle of the room, and dropped into it, lifting up his legs; two pages on their knees immediately seized his legs, pulled off the King's shoes, and let them drop with a crash, which was a point of etiquette. As soon as he heard the noise, the usher opened the door, saying, "Gentlemen will please pass out." Those present went away, and the ceremony was finished. However, the person who was holding the candlestick was allowed to stay if he had anything special to say to the King, and hence the value attached to this strange favor.

The political fermentation going on at this period interests the Comtesse de Boigne as she looks back at her childhood, but she wisely subordinates her comments thereon to such notes as the foregoing, and to the record of her own personal experiences. We are interested, of course, in what she has to say about such memorable episodes as the flight to Varennes, but her pages seem somehow more to the purpose when they help us to realize the familiar little details of eighteenth century existence. We delight in her stories of her popularity as a little girl among the royal ladies, who evidently petted her to an extraordinary degree, giving her, for example, a doll so magnificent that even in her old age she can write about it with a certain fervor. We like, too, her allusion to the large white spaniel which shared her walks. "If the road happened to be very muddy, he was put into a large white linen bag and carried by two of the servants on duty." The anecdote is droll enough, yet it is also one of those innumerable trifling touches in the memoirs of the revolutionary period which help us to understand how France came to have her bath of blood. One can imagine how that spaniel in his bag may have stirred the turbid imagination of some wretched peasant passing on the highway.

But it is not of the lurid aspects of the great upheaval that we hear most in these memoirs. The author was fortunate enough, as we have already noted, to be out of harm's way at the worst moments in the development of French affairs. We turn from the French court to scenes in England, where, by the way, Mrs. Fitzherbert shows her an enormous collection of shoe buckles, all belonging to the Prince of Wales, and where, in due course, after some little travel, the young Frenchwoman is married to General de Boigne, recently returned from India with an immense fortune. She was sixteen and he was forty-nine. There was no love between them. Indeed, she told him when she accepted his offer that she did not care for him the least and probably never should do so, but that if he were willing to establish the independence of her parents, her gratitude would enable her to marry him without reluctance. General de Boigne appears to have made the best of a bad bargain with considerable good nature, and though, no doubt, he had his drawbacks, his wife's memoirs leave us with the impression that she must have been rather selfish in her treatment of him. Reading between the lines, we are just as sorry for him as for her, and are, perhaps, even a little more compassionate, for it is not obvious that the marriage gave him any happiness whatever, whereas the Comtesse evidently contrived to lead a fairly comfortable and amusing existence.

She had, we infer, a gift for adjusting herself to circumstances. A Royalist by birth and breeding, she nevertheless got along very well under Napoleon. "Notwithstanding my prejudices," she says, "I was never able to suppress a very sincere admiration for the First Consul," and on her return to France she took a place in Parisian society which her relations with the old regime strengthened rather than weakened. "In the early days of the Empire," she says, "opposition society in Paris was very pleasant. As soon as I was initiated and had formed a circle of my own, I found life very delightful." At this point in her memoirs she draws some capital portraits of Mme. Récamier, Mme. de Staël, and other famous figures, and, of course, does not fail to give us a few vivid sketches of